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VII.—THE POSITION OF GROUP C IN THE *CANTERBURY TALES*

It has for a long time been generally agreed among Chaucerian scholars that the most serious defect of the Chaucer Society's arrangement of the *Canterbury Tales* is its placing of the *Physician's Tale*, Pardoner's prolog, and *Pardoner's Tale*, which constitute what is generally known as Group C, between the *Nun's Priest's Tale* and the Wife of Bath's prolog. This arrangement has absolutely no ms. authority, for no ms. is known to exist in which Group C either precedes Group D or follows Group B. Nor does Group C contain any references to time or place which make the Chaucer Society's arrangement a probable one. Indeed, the arrangement was adopted for no better reason than to make the tales of the third day not less than those of the second,¹ a reason which we can only characterise as a trivial one.

But altho the *Physician's Tale* and the *Pardoner's Tale* contain, as Furnivall said, "no internal evidence as to their proper place in the work",² the ms. evidence is decisive in indicating at least which tales they shall precede, for the sequence CB² (*Pardoner's Tale* followed by *Shipman's Tale* and the rest of Group B) is almost invariable in the mss. Of the mss. with regard to which information is accessible, thirty-three contain the tales in this sequence.³ In addition to these, three mss. which do not

¹ Furnivall, *Temporary Preface*, p. 42; cf. *ibid.*, pp. 24 ff.

² *Ibid.*, p. 25.

³ These mss. (indicated by means of Miss Hammond's abbreviations, *Chaucer*, pp. 163 ff.) are these: Add. 5140; Add. 35286; Egerton 2726; Harley 1758; Harley 7333; Harley 7334; Lansd. 851; Royal 17; Royal 18; Sloane 1685; Sloane 1686; Barlow; Bodl. 414; Bodl.

show the sequence CB² contain clear evidence of their derivation from mss. which did have this sequence.⁴ Five other mss. which do not exhibit the sequence CB², but which are so confused in their arrangement as not even to preserve the internal integrity of Groups C and B²,⁵ must be entirely disregarded, for it is clear that a ms. of this character is useless as an authority with regard to the order in which these groups shall be arranged. In opposition to the thirty-three mss. which exhibit the sequence CB² we have the testimony of one ms., Arch. Selden B 14, in which the tales are arranged in the order A E¹ D E² F¹ B¹ B² G C F² H I.⁶ Now it is entirely possible that a single ms. might preserve the correct sequence of the *Canterbury Tales* and that all the other mss. might be incorrect in arrangement, for the single ms. might be de-

686; Laud 600; Laud 739; Rawl. poet. 149; Ch. Ch.; Corpus; New; Dd.; Gg.; Ii.; Del.; Dev.; Ellesmere; Hengwrt; Egerton 2863; Egerton 2864; Hodson-Ashb.; Hodson; Lichfield; Paris. The data concerning nearly all of these mss. are given by Miss Hammond, pp. 173 ff., for the most part from her own collations. The order of the tales in Hengwrt is not given by her but must be ascertained from Furnivall's Trial-Tables, *Six-Text Print*, Part I.

⁴ Tho the Hatton ms. places E¹ between C and B², and the Petworth ms. places the first part of B² (Shipman and Prioress) before B¹ with the rest of B² after C, the presence in both of the spurious Pardoner-Shipman link shows that the present arrangement is not original but the result of displacement; for the data see Hammond, pp. 184, 200. Ms. Mm divides B² into three fragments, one of them following C, but the presence of the spurious Pardoner-Shipman link and the numbers attached to the tales show that the original arrangement was CB²; for the data see Hammond, pp. 192, 188.

⁵ These mss. are Rawl. poet. 223, Trinity 49, Trinity 3, Trinity 15, Northumberland; for the data see Hammond, pp. 186, 189, 193, 199.

⁶ Hammond, p. 187. B¹ and B² are connected by means of the Man of Law's end-link, which is here converted into a Shipman's prolog. That the Selden ms. is not a trustworthy authority as to arrangement is the opinion of Hammond (*Chaucer*, p. 187), and it was also that of Skeat (*Modern Language Review*, v, pp. 430 ff.).

rived from a superior textual tradition altogether independent of that of the other mss. But we cannot accept the authority of the Selden ms. against that of the other mss. unless we assume for it such an origin as I have indicated. Have we any evidence for making this assumption? If the Selden ms. is derived from a superior and independent textual tradition, its arrangement ought at least to be better on the whole than that of the other mss. We actually find, however, that the Selden ms. is in no respect better in its arrangement than others, but that in certain important particulars it is demonstrably wrong where other mss. are right. It shares with all the other mss. the defect of placing the reference to Rochester (B 3116) after the reference to Sittingbourne (D 847). It is unquestionably wrong (a) in placing the *Clerk's Tale* (with its reference to the Wife of Bath in E 1170) before the Wife of Bath's prolog and tale;⁷ (b) in splitting Group F by placing some 7000 lines of text between the *Squire's Tale* and the *Franklin's Tale*. In view of these facts it is impossible for us to concede any authority whatever to the Selden ms. when its testimony is opposed to that of all the other mss. Its testimony against the order CB² is therefore of no weight.

Since there is nothing in the text itself that would lead an editor or scribe to introduce the order CB² if he did not find it in his original, only one explanation will account satisfactorily for the fact that our mss. of the *Canterbury Tales*, with all their varieties of arrangement, so consistently preserve CB² as a solid block of text,—namely, that this part of the *Canterbury Tales* was a solid

⁷ The separation of the *Merchant's Tale* from the *Clerk's Tale* must be the result of accidental displacement, for the linking of the two is complete in the text of the Selden ms., even tho the interposition of Group D breaks the continuity of Group E.

block of text in those mss. of Chaucer himself from which our mss. are derived.⁸ In this respect at least, however defective may be their arrangement in other respects, the mss. must be right, and no arrangement of the tales can be considered a good one which disregards the testimony of the mss. by breaking up the order CB².

But what position should CB² occupy in relation to other portions of the text? It cannot be placed between Group A and B¹, for this sequence is attested by such an overwhelming weight of ms. evidence that we are obliged to accept it as that of Chaucer's own mss.⁹ Nor can we place CB² between the *Manciple's Tale* and, the Parson's prolog, for as to the correctness of the sequence

⁸ For the alternative hypothesis, that all existing mss. are derived from a single ms. which was not Chaucer's own and in which the tales were arranged in an order for which he was not responsible, we have not a particle of evidence, and the hypothesis is improbable in itself.

⁹ The order AB¹ is found in the following 35 mss.: Add. 5140; Add. 35286; Egerton 2726; Harley 1758; Harley 7333; Harley 7334; Harley 7335; Lansd. 851; Royal 17; Royal 18; Sloane 1685; Sloane 1686; Barlow; Bodl. 414; Bodl. 686; Laud 739; Rawl. poet. 141; Rawl. poet. 149; Rawl. poet. 223; Corpus; New; Dd.; Gg.; Ii.; Trinity 3; Trinity 15; Dev.; Ellesmere; Egerton 2863; Hodson-Ashb.; Hodson; Egerton 2864; Lichfield; Northumberland; Paris. For the data concerning their arrangement see Hammond, pp. 173 ff. It is clear from the state of the links that this was also the order back of mss. Hatton and Petworth (see Hammond, pp. 184 and 200, and note 4 above); the numbers attached to the tales in ms. Mm show that this ms. also was derived from one having the order AB¹ (see Hammond, p. 192). Mss. Laud 600, Ch. Ch., Del., Hengwrt, and Holkham do not have the order AB¹, but place B¹ elsewhere, always in some position which cannot possibly be correct and not the same in any two mss. See Hammond, pp. 185, 188, 195, 196, 198. Ms. Trinity 49 places B¹ in still a different position, between the *Pardoner's Tale* and a fragment of B² (see Hammond, p. 189), but the state of its links has never been ascertained and it is therefore not possible to say what may have been the arrangement of the ms. from which it was derived. ms. Selden and its arrangement have already been discussed.

HI there can be no question at all; not only is it that of virtually all the mss., but the two so-called groups are inseparably linked together by the opening line of the Parson's prolog:

By that the maunciple hadde his tale al ended.¹⁰

Finally, it is impossible to break up DEF by placing CB² between D and E or between E and F, for from the evidence of the text itself as well as from the evidence of the mss. it is certain that the arrangement DEF represents Chaucer's maturest accomplishment with regard to this part of the text.¹¹ We have therefore to choose one of three positions for CB²: (1) between B¹ and D;¹²

¹⁰ Of the mss. which contain both groups, all but five have them in the order HI. These mss., Add. 35286, Rawl. poet 223, Ch. Ch., Trinity 3, Hengwrt, have different arrangements, of which all must be wrong and none is found in more than one ms. For the data see Hammond, pp. 173, 186, 188, 193, and the Trial-Tables.

¹¹ For the internal evidence see Kittredge's article, *Chaucer's Discussion of Marriage, Modern Philology*, IX, pp. 435 ff. The ms. evidence is too complex to be stated here. In general it may be said that all the mss. which have all of D E F either (1) present the groups as a solid block of text, arranged in the order in which I have named them; or (2) present all of the material of these groups as a solid block of Text, but with various misarrangements of the members of which the groups are composed; or (3) present as a solid block of text the great bulk of the material, but with various mismanagements of the members of the groups and with one member separated altogether from its fellows by the interposition of other sections of text. Of (1) an example is the Ellesmere ms., of (2) an example is Harley 7333, and of (3) an example is the Hatton ms. Two mss. Ch. Ch. and Hengwrt, break up D E F to a greater extent than mss. of the third class; for the arrangement of these see Hammond, p. 188 and the Trial-Tables. In mss. Add. 35286, Harley 7335, and Laud 600 the arrangement of the text resembles that of the mss. of the first class but is not identical with it; see Hammond, pp. 173, 179, 185.

¹² To place D E F between G and H would be against the clear evidence of the mss., for (except in ms. Selden) the only group which ever breaks the sequence G H is CB².

(2) between F and G; (3) between G and H. The mss. furnish no decisive evidence to guide us in choosing between these three positions, for they are divided between the arrangements CB²G and CB²H.¹³ The question of the best position for CB², however, is not exactly of the same nature as the question of the best position for Group C alone. Group C, as we observed, contains no internal evidence to show what ought to be its position in relation to the rest of the tales. We have only the evidence of the mss., and that evidence is so unanimous that we cannot hesitate to accept it as conclusive. But the testimony of the mss. is not conclusive with regard to the position of CB²; moreover, when CB² is accepted as a solid block of text we have as a guide internal evidence which is not available as long as we fail to recognise that CB² is virtually a single group. Now if we take into account this internal evidence, there can be no doubt as to which is the best position for CB². If we place it between F and G, the Summoner's reference in D 847 to Sittingbourne, which is 41 miles from London, will precede the Host's reference in B 3116 to Rochester, which is only 30 miles from London. If we place CB² between G and H, the reference to Rochester will occur between Chaucer's reference in G 556 to Boughton, which is 50 miles from London, and his reference in H 2 to Bob-up-and-down, which is between Boughton and Canterbury.¹⁴ If, however, we place CB² between B¹ and D, the references to Deptford,¹⁵ Rochester, Sittingbourne, Boughton, and Bob-up-and-down occur

¹³ For the data see Hammond, pp. 173 ff. and the Trial-Tables.

¹⁴ The exact location of Bob-up-and-down has never been satisfactorily determined, but since Group G certainly precedes Group HI Bob-up-and-down must have been farther along the road to Canterbury than Boughton.

¹⁵ A 3906.

in the text in the same order as that in which the places succeed each other along the road. These references are not so numerous that it would have been difficult for Chaucer to keep track of them, and it seems reasonable to assume that he intended them to occur in the right order. The inference is therefore a justifiable one that Chaucer referred to Rochester in the Monk's prolog and to Sittingbourne in the Wife of Bath's prolog because he intended that the Monk should precede the Wife of Bath.

If we accept this internal evidence as supplementary to the external evidence of the mss., we must conclude that the best arrangement of the *Canterbury Tales* is A B¹ C B² D E F G H I.¹⁶ Tho it is not known to exist in

¹⁶ That is, assuming that we are justified in arranging the *Canterbury Tales* at all. Skeat in his later years was of the opinion that we are not, but that the sole duty of the editor with regard to the arrangement of the tales is to ascertain precisely the order in which Chaucer left them and print them in that order (*The Eight-Text Edition of the Canterbury Tales*, pp. 35 f.). He accordingly recommended to future editors the course of printing the tales in what is virtually the order of ms. Harley 7334 (*Modern Language Review*, v, p. 434). Scholars who do not share Skeat's belief that Harley 7334 "gives the best and latest authoritative arrangement of the tales" (*The Eight-Text Edition of the Canterbury Tales*, p. 35), might, if they wished to follow this principle, print the tales in the order in which they occur in some other ms. The principle, tho a perfectly defensible one on abstract grounds, would be difficult to apply in practice and its application could scarcely give any very valuable result. A better principle seems to me to be that which Tatlock states when he says that "if we can devise an arrangement without serious inconsistencies, we are justified in preferring it to a self-contradictory one, and in accepting it as coming near Chaucer's intention, even tho the one be the arrangement of no ms., and the other that of many" (*The Harleian Manuscript 7334 and Revision of the Canterbury Tales*, p. 26). The suggestion that B² should be followed by C is not a new one, for Skeat (*The Eight-Text Edition of the Canterbury Tales*, p. 30) says, "If we are to regard evidence at all, there is no other place for it." Compare also his recommendation in the *Modern Language Review* which is

any ms., it expresses better than any other Chaucer's intentions, so far at least as his intentions were ever expressed in literary form.

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cited above. Tatlock says likewise (*The Harleian Manuscript and Revision of the Canterbury Tales*, p. 27) that ms. Harley 7334 in putting C before B² "could not easily be proved wrong." It is interesting to note in this connection that Lawrence (*Modern Philology*, xi, p. 257) argues in favor of the sequence Nun's Priest-Wife of Bath, tho on grounds altogether independent of those set forth in the present paper.